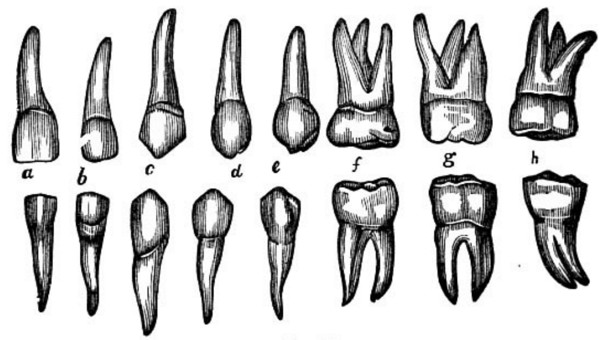


Fig. 27.

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Primitive Toothcare

a DIY Guide to Uncivilized Oral Hygiene



Rowan WalkingWolf, PhD

this "gum twig" was, he explained that he used sassafras root because it tasted good, that he chewed the end of a small piece of the root until it was frayed like a brush and that he carried this in his shirt pocket, using it after eating anything during the day. The patient stated that he couldn't stand to have anything in or between his teeth so he used this cleaning device often (six or eight times daily). The patient demonstrated how he used the "gum twig", and it was obvious that his method was very thorough and effective. He cleaned the teeth and massaged the gingiva very thoroughly using his method.

The patient indicated that he learned the use of the "gum twig" from his father, who died at the age of eighty-four never having owned a toothbrush, never having visited a dentist and never having lost a tooth.

When questioned about diet, the patient stated a definite liking for raw vegetables (turnips, carrots, etc.) which he often took from his fields, washed as best he could and ate while working.

The patient stated that his wife and daughter had "terrible" teeth, but that their diet and oral hygiene habits were quite different from his. They did not share his enthusiasm for the "gum twig".

The patient had lived all his life in an area which reportedly had no natural fluoride in the water. To our knowledge, he had never been exposed to fluorides to any significant extent.

Conclusions
Some primitive methods of caring for the teeth and their supporting structures can be very effective when applied conscientiously and properly.

* * *

If the compelling evidence of thousands of years of human existence without cavities and oral problems wasn't enough for you, well, there you have it. Western science supports it, so it must be true, right?

If you've found the information herein helpful, I sincerely hope you'll constantly experiment with new plants for oral health. I'd love to hear personal accounts of primitive toothcare, so please feel free to write me. Happy "brushing"!

INDUSTRIAL SCIENCE AFFIRMS PRIMITIVE MOUTH CARE

FOR THOSE WHO RESPECT the opinions of "experts" and "doctors," I decided to include excerpts from this fantastic article I found. The article is entitled "Preventative Dentistry Primitive Style: A Case History," and it acknowledges the efficacy of primitive oral care even though it's written by industrial scientists! It is written by Walter W. Fingar, D.D.S., M.S. , and Stephen A. Ross, D.D.S., M.A.T., and originally appeared in the Winter 1974 edition of *CoEvolution Quarterly*.

* * *

Case Report
The 63-year-old male patient presented himself to our clinic at our request. We had heard of him through another patient who was resisting a student′s efforts to set up a preventive maintenance program for her by saying that she had always brushed her teeth with no apparent success and that her neighbor had never seen a dentist, didn′t own a toothbrush and had ″perfect″ teeth. We had to see this for ourselves so we called the neighbor and asked if he would permit us to examine his mouth. He very graciously, even anxiously, consented.

The patient, a farmer, was the magistrate in his area and a most cooperative and intelligent subject for our study. Radiographic and clinical examination showed:
1. a mouth completely free of caries and with no existing restorations;
2. thirty-two teeth in beautiful occlusion;
3. an amazingly healthy periodontium with almost no bone loss;
4. almost no plaque formation, but slight calculus formation on the lingual surfaces of the mandibular anterior teeth and the buccal of the maxillary molars; and
5. no cervical erosion or abrasion, with only normal wear patterns on the occluding surfaces.

The patient′s medical history was essentially negative and his personal hygiene very good. When the patient was questioned, we learned that he had never before indeed been in a dental chair. He said that he had owned a toothbrush for the past five or six years but seldom used it. He was quick to add, however, that he had used a ″gum twig″ all his life. When asked what

GUESS WHAT...

TEETH ARE MEANT TO LAST a lifetime. Yep, that's right. Your teeth- the grinding, pulverizing, shredding tools cemented to your skull- are meant to last until you die, just like the rest of your bones. It should come as no surprise that, like all animals, our teeth are resilient tools. Look at every feral animal left in the wilderness and ask: how many non-human animals consistently have tooth decay? Excluding domesticated animals (whose diets are largely carbohydrates and refined sugar), the only animal who regularly suffers from cavities is the honey bear, who eats ample amounts of refined sugar.

Like our domesticated companions, we too suffer from tooth decay and dental caries (cavities) because of our diet. Refined sugar is the primary factor in teeth rotting, and civilized diets are primarily made up of sugar. Most people are totally ignorant or at best flippant about what's in their food, what many of these ingredients are, and the effects that civilized imitation-food-product has on their minds and bodies. Cavities and tooth decay are excellent indicators of how toxic the civilized diet is.

The omnipresence of cavities wherever the heinous putrefaction of Western Civ has reached has given rise to the dental profession. Dentistry is fucked up for too many reasons to list here. It has all the problems and inconsistencies inherent in every trade that requires intense specialization and professional schooling. Like every medical profession, it is disempowering in its attitude toward and treatment of the uneducated, the impoverished, and the unprofessional. It is unforgivably wasteful, and thrives on and upholds this throw-away culture. Also like every other medical profession, dentistry acts as a pimp to a whole catalog of nefarious industrial products manufactured by the big corporations that control the dental world.

Far more importantly than any of these, civilized dentistry itself is bullshit. How many tens, even hundreds, of thousands of years did we as a species survive and prosper without dentists, toothbrushes, toothpastes, dental surgery, or cavities? By and large, the non-civilized, wild humans who still exist at present and all of the feral humans who have existed before our time have practically no health problems involving their teeth or gums. This is due to the lack of refined sugars in the diets of most primitive peoples. Those groups who do consume refined sugars- like wildcrafted honey and sugarcane- have the knowledge and wisdom to use plants to heal and clean their teeth and gums. Even among primitive peoples who do not consume sugars, the practice of using plants to clean teeth and maintain healthy gums is commonplace.

Unlike civilized dentistry, primitive tooth and gum care is a very empowering skill. It is universally available to people regardless of age, sex or gender, race, experience, education, material wealth, or geographical location, provided people are willing to learn plants native to their bioregion. It's also remarkably easy, once you've got the plants and techniques mastered. All the "waste" produced from the process of uncivilized mouth preservation is organic, ecologically responsible, and infinitely sustainable and biodegradable, not at all similar to the rubber gloves, sterile gauze pads, and mountains of plastic tossed out by dentists and oral surgeons. And arguably the best part: primitive toothcare is totally free!

In the hopes of helping people empower themselves, regain control of their lives and physical health, find autonomy in an increasingly authoritarian world, and recapture a little part of their wild (i.e.- *human*) selves, the rest of this zine is devoted to teaching and using ancient methods of toothcare.

Catnip

This common, delicious feline-intoxicating mint is especially effective at numbing teeth and gums. Consumed in large enough quantities, it can also sedate humans.

Spilanthes

This perennial, also known as toothache plant and paracress, is native to Brazil and is grown as an ornamental in gardens the world over. It is among the world's most potent analgesics (painkillers). Chewing even a tiny bit makes the teeth, gums, and tongue go totally numb.

Others

The plants listed above are the tiniest fraction of herbs that can be used to keep a healthy mouth. I recommend acquiring a good book on herbal medicine and learning well the hundreds of other plants that keep bones and connective tissue health, as well as those that fight harmful bacteria. Please don't limit yourself to the plants listed herein.

Licorice
Besides its function as a toothstick, licorice can be utilized as a flavorful mouthwash. Licorice root can also be chewed and/or eaten for the same effects.

Hawthorn Berry
These fruits stabilize collagen and strengthen gum tissues. Used as a mouthwash or chewed.

Horsetail
As mentioned earlier, horsetail can be chewed to cleanse the teeth and gums. It also makes passable sandpaper and can be used to scour any number of surfaces.

Prickly Ash Bark
Apparently makes a great tooth powder to be used with a toothstick or brush, but I've never tried it.

Birch Sap
This was the favorite chewing gum of several indigenous North American groups, and for good reason. Birth sap contains xylitol, a naturally occurring sugar that actually helps oral hygiene and prevents cavities! The terpenes in birch gum may also give those who eat it a buzz. I highly recommend birch sap, not only for its mouth benefits, but also because xylitol has numerous other health benefits.

Cinnamon Bark
Because this delectable plant is good for the health of bones and joints, consuming it internally is good for long-term tooth and gum health.

The First Step

SO, YOU WANT TO TAKE care of your teeth and gums as our ancestors have for countless thousands of years? Fuck yeah! Unfortunately, there's a hard part. As in so many radical struggles, the first step is always the hardest. Taking care of your teeth and gums naturally and primitively is no different.

So here's the bad news: for your mouth to be truly healthy, you have to stop eating refined sugar.

This includes bleached white cane and beet sugar, brown sugar, evaporated cane juice, turbinado sugar, and large quantities of honey, agave, molasses, and maple syrup. Obviously, this also includes nasty shit like high fructose corn syrup, Splenda, and Sweet & Lo (which you really shouldn't be poisoning your beautiful body with anyway).

This sucks, right? You're thinking, "How the hell am I gonna completely eliminate sugar from my diet? It's in *everything*!" Well, it's true that sugar is in just about every civilized food, and it's certainly hard to quit such an addictive and universal drug. But don't despair! Start slowly and work sugar out of your diet with gradual steps. Or, you know, keep eating sugar and pay dentists to bombard your face with chemicals to keep your teeth from rotting, contributing your fair share to the $16 *billion* global dental industry. That's okay, too...

It seems like an impossible goal, but I promise you you'll feel better (as in more energy, sharper mind, more endurance) once sugar is divorced from the foods you ingest. This is especially true for the super-refined, bleached white swill. I still love and eat honey and maple syrup, and after over a year of taking care of

my teeth primitively (that is, without toothbrushes, toothpaste, or dentists), I've endured no complications or cavities from the small amount of sugars I do consume.

Whether or not you completely cut out refined sugars, it's crucial in taking care of your pearly whites (or, hmm, dull yellows?) that you learn the next and most regular part of primitive dental care.

Toothsticks & Tannins

TOOTHSTICKS ARE ESSENTIALLY PRIMITIVE TOOTHBRUSHES, except for some key differences. First, toothsticks are, as the name suggests, sticks. This means they're indefinitely sustainable, biodegradable and compostable, they contain all of the healing compounds commonly added to toothpaste plus a hundred others, they can be made from a huge variety of species, and they can be found and used anywhere in the world for free. Toothbrushes, on the other hand, are made of plastics, which are neither sustainable nor biodegradable nor compostable, they contain no healing properties in and of themselves, they require the horrendous destruction spewed forth by industrial infrastructure to manufacture, and they are in no way free.

A huge variety of trees, shrubs, and small herbs can be used as toothsticks. In choosing what kind of plant to use, one of the most important factors to consider is whether or not it contains tannins (tannic acid). Tannins are the substance that makes acorns bitter, and the substance that causes the mouth-puckering fuzzy feeling when eating unripe fruit.

In terms of mouth care, tannins are important because they are astringent. Astringent compounds shrink or constrict body tissue.

The other two methods of mouthcare are practically identical. An astonishing number of plants exist- far too many to list here- that can be chewed and eaten to furnish all the positive effects we've been discussing. These same plants can be used as poultices, or compact dressings, for inflamed or otherwise suffering gums. Once used, these gum packs can be eaten, supplying nutrients as well as medicine.

Following below is a list of medicinal herbs that can be used in sustaining a healthy mouth.

* * *

Acorns
When the fruit of the oak tree is boiled it yields a potent stew of tannins that makes a superb mouthwash. I also use acorn tannins to tan hides, and greatly prefer them to brains in that capacity.

Fennel
Often dismissed as a weed, this is one of the most flavorful and useful mouth care plants that can be found just about anywhere. Every part of the plant is good for the mouth, particularly the seeds. I eat fennel as often as I can for fresh breath and because the taste is incredible.

Chaparral
This welcome friend smells and tastes like no other. As a mouthwash it is an excellent cavity deterrent.

Turmeric
Thought many consider turmeric nothing more than a common kitchen spice, it is also an outstanding mouthwash and gum pack.

Alfalfa (Root)
I have no experience with this, and can't verify its effectivity. Several sources say it works well.

Horseradish (Root)
I've never tried this, but, if *wasabi* has taught me anything, I'm sure it's a hell of a chew.

Mouthwashes, Healing Edibles, & Gum Packs

USING TOOTHSTICKS TO BRUSH and heal the mouth usually constitutes sufficient oral maintenance. However, there are other methods for cleaning the mouth and its various inhabitants as well as encouraging circulation, tightening gums, healing connective tissue, and combating tooth decay and foul breath. These methods include mouthwashes, chewing and eating healing herbs, and packing healing herbs into poultice for the gums.

Mouthwashes are pretty self-explanatory, although the type of mouthwashes we're considering here are plant based and completely organic. Compared to that neon-green, poisonous garbage in plastic bottles, herbal mouthwashes are far superior. Most often, primitive mouthwashes, like toothsticks, contain large quantities of tannins in tandem with volatile oils and other healing and nutritive ingredients. The standard preparation for herbal mouthwashes involves steeping or boiling the plant matter in water, as in making tea. For soft plant matter like leaves and flowers, this is known as an infusion; for woody plant matter like bark, roots, and stalks, this is called a decoction. Once made, both infusions and decoctions are used as any other mouthwash is used, and can be drunk as a tea as well.

When introduced to the mouth, astringent substances (i.e.- those plants containing tannins) tighten and heal gum tissue, which is critical to proper oral hygiene. Thus, using toothsticks made of tannin-rich materials is vital.

Besides tannins, just about every plant under the sun contains at least one compound or chemical that has positive healing benefits and promotes blood flow in human beings. Unfortunately, because there are thousands upon thousands of different healing compounds in the plant world, it's nigh impossible to learn them all. Fortunately, it's not important to learn the compounds themselves, but rather to learn that plants that contain the compounds. This, too, can be an involved process, but have no fear, for you have an entire life to learn!

Once you've actually laid hands on a mouth-healing stick or root that's dripping with tannins, it's important to understand the technique of using toothsticks. This basically involves chewing one end of the stick/root until it becomes frayed and flexible like a toothbrush. Then, as with a toothbrush, the frayed end of the toothstick is brushed lightly over the fronts and backs of all teeth, in the crevices between teeth, over the gums, and over the roof of the mouth and tongue.

Using toothsticks in such a way removes food particles and plaque from the teeth, tongue, and gums. It also aids in the tightening of gums and promotes healing in the mouth by releasing the tannins and other beneficial chemicals contained in the toothstick itself. The process of cleaning the teeth by means of toothstick should probably be done at least once a day, although I often "brush" after every large meal. It's especially important to clean with a toothstick after meals involving refined sugars, as failure to do so allows the sugar to begin its malicious task.

Following below is a short list of some common toothstick plants. Most of these are native to or frequently found in North America, although some foreign species are listed too. Many of the plants listed, like oaks, can be found on other continents and in a number of bioregions. Please experiment with new plants and share the knowledge of their effectiveness with others. So much of the knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors has been forcibly eradicated, and it's up to us to rediscover it, even if it's as mundane as mouth care.

* * *

Eucalyptus
This aromatic naturalized tree is one of my favorites. It's commonly planted as an ornamental, so it's easy to find, and it tastes and smells *so* good.

Oaks
These magnificent trees contain more than ample tannins and they occur just about everywhere in the northern hemisphere. Not the tastiest tree to nibble, but potent nonetheless. The acorns of oaks also contain sizable tannin deposits. When boiled, the tannins are leached out, and can then be saved and used as mouthwash and in tanning hides.

Bay
I haven't used bay, but several sources list it as an effective toothstick.

Fir
Firs invigorate like no other plant. Douglas-Fir (which isn't technically a fir) is also an excellent toothstick, if you can get a piece that doesn't break and splinter.

Juniper
This includes the falsely named Eastern Red Cedar and the many junipers of the West. These trees are *so* tasty.

Neem
Neem is *incredibly* bitter, making it excellent for gums and digestion alike. Next to wormwood, this is the most bitter plant I've ever tried, and I *love* it!

Sassafras (Twigs and Root)
Tastes absolutely delicious. Common in southeastern North America.

Horsetails (whole plant)
These plants contain large amounts of silica, which makes them useful abrading tools. Unlike other plants, these provide neither twigs nor roots for toothsticks. Rather, its body segments are used as a sort of scrubbing pad, squashed flat and rubbed in circular motions on the teeth and gums. It can also be chewed or brushed onto the teeth (using a toothstick).

Mallow (Root)
Obviously marshmallow is the most delicious and desirable of the mallows, but common mallow has a greater range and is easier to find. This lovely plant explodes across my yard every spring, and I take full advantage of it as a food and toothstick. The roots are delicious, and become silken when chewed.

Licorice (Root)
This delightful plant doesn't really need describing. It's a pleasure to brush with and eat, and promotes excellent oral health.